

# UK: The Myth of a Left Wing Brexit

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**The lies and duplicity surrounding the Brexit campaign have been highlighted at great length since 2016. In retrospect, we can see that the activities of Facebook and other networks in that campaign constituted a qualitatively new phenomenon in the undermining of democracy.**

‘Fake news’ and the forces that weaponise it are part of a much larger subversion. Liberal democracy is under global attack. Putin - another supporter of Brexit for his own geostrategic reasons - has declared liberal values “obsolete”.

In China, state propaganda denigrates “universal values” while state repression menaces Hong Kong’s democracy activists.

Trump, another ardent Brexiteer, praises authoritarian regimes internationally. In this context, Brexit becomes part of a much larger attack on liberal, rational, internationalist values from conservative forces that increasingly reject democracy in favour of toxic authoritarian nationalism. Boris Johnson is now embracing this manipulative rhetoric. Behind Johnson stands Farage, and behind Farage stand the most extreme forces.

If this is the global balance of forces, what prospects for ‘Lexit’, a left wing Brexit that delivers for the working class? Not good, especially given its failure to distance itself from the mainstream nationalist rhetoric that dominates the Leave campaign. Brendan Chilton, Labour Leave’s general secretary, wrote in Spiked magazine: “The international humiliation is comparable to Suez, and may indeed surpass it. Then, as now, we have been reduced in status and prowess, humiliated by bureaucrats and an animated and lavishly funded fifth column within our parliament... What has happened to the power and reach of the Foreign Office? Why has our Prime Minister capitulated and backed a treaty that makes our country a vassal state?”

Note the rhetoric here is indistinguishable from that of Farage. The left does our movement a huge disservice if it embraces this narrative. But note too that the same people who lament Britain’s ‘vassal state’ status in the EU ignore the real danger of Britain outside the EU becoming wholly subordinate to US policy, and being obliged, as part of a trade deal, to accept lower food standards and the privatisation and sale of the NHS to US health companies.

The myth of a ‘left Brexit’ takes its proponents into strange company. Chilton writes for Spiked, a magazine funded by the dark money of the hard right Koch brothers, and the political home of Claire Fox, who ran in the EU elections for Farage’s Brexit Party. Socialists should have nothing to do with it.

Ultimately ‘Lexit’ is driven by the same isolationism that motivates the wider Leave movement. It offers no path forward for socialist movements in other EU states that could face the same problems as a Corbyn-led government. And this is the crucial point: the battle for a Corbyn government here is part of the struggle to radically restructure the EU to make its institutions work for the people of Europe. Labour’s membership and popular support over the last four years have surged, in contrast

to the existential crisis engulfing most other democratic socialist parties in western Europe. Europe's left unsurprisingly sees Corbyn's Labour as a beacon of hope and wants it to lead the fight to transform the EU. This assumes greater urgency, amid rising awareness that many of the biggest problems we face - particularly climate emergency - cannot be fixed by individual states alone.

So where next? Re-running the referendum, the main demand of the People's Vote campaign, is not currently in Labour's power to deliver, nor is there a parliamentary majority for it.

Campaigning, however, to transform the institutions of the EU over the lifetime of a five year term of office, with the promise of a new public vote if such a strategy proves unsuccessful, would be unifying, distinctive and honest.

A final gripe of those advocating 'Lexit' is that ignoring the 2016 result would be a slap in the face to the marginalised voters who voted Leave and a victory for an out of touch political elite. The fallacy here is to accept the framing of the debate by the Leave campaign that pitches ordinary working class Leave voters against a corrupt Remainer elite. A mountain of empirical data now debunks this characterisation of the 'typical' Leave voter.

And of course, it's now a Leave elite that runs the country, while many ordinary Remainers are left feeling marginalised and powerless. To those who criticise Jeremy Corbyn over the last three years for the balancing act he has pursued on Brexit, it is worth underlining that he above all understands the toxic 'culture war' aspects of the debate and has worked tirelessly to bring people together on this.

But one thing is now clear: the idea of a left wing exit from the EU is a myth, pure and simple.

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